

Tips for avoiding “acne” during pandemic

Pensacola, Fla. (July 15, 2020) – As the pandemic continues across the country, masking has become a routine in many cities to help stop the spread of the virus. Many individuals are required to wear masks for extended periods of time, such as healthcare workers and other essential workers, and dermatologists report seeing an uptick in skin irritation from masking.

The technical term is "acne mechanica," where an acneiform eruption occurs after repeated physical trauma. Athletes like football players sometimes develop this where the helmet rubs against the forehead; other patients may develop an eruption from a seatbelt or other source of repetitive irritation. Similarly, masks cause friction and irritation from physical trauma, but are unique in that they cover the mouth and nose, which introduces humidity and saliva while also trapping sweat, bacteria, and dirt against the skin. Common problems associated with mask use include acne outbreaks and something called "perioral dermatitis," which is different but just as--if not more--aggravating than traditional acne.

[Rahul N. Chavan MD, PhD](#), dermatologist with Ascension Medical Group Sacred Heart, recommends the following tips for reducing skin irritation while masking:

- **Consider wearing cotton masks.** Cotton masks tend to have better filtration and breathability properties than most other natural fibers, but are gentle on the skin. Masks made from polyester can be quite irritating, and certain other fabrics also can cause irritation or even allergy. Cleanse the skin before and after mask use in order to rid the skin of trapped dirt, saliva, and sweat, and it is also important to regularly wash masks.
- **Wear as little makeup as possible beneath your mask.** Friction from the mask and the humid environment beneath the mask can clog pores and cause acne outbreaks.
- **Be mindful of skincare products that may cause irritation.** If individuals are using skincare products that can be irritating, like retinols and exfoliants, they may want to back off a bit on using these products, as repeated microtrauma from mask wearing can cause further irritation and even dermatitis.
- **Using a moisturizer regularly can help treat and prevent mask-related dermatitis.** Moisturizers can help support the skin barrier and help it handle rubbing and irritation from masks. However, it is important to not use too heavy a moisturizer, especially as we head into a more hot and humid time of year, because overly greasy moisturizers can clog pores, especially in patients with naturally oily skin.

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